

StMungo's

Frontline

Winter edition 2024

**“St Mungo’s
is always
there for
me. They’ve
helped me
feel like
I’m part of
something.”**

**Now is the time
to respond.**



See how we’re responding to rough
sleeping this winter.



Festive celebrations are underway for many of us. But for the record number of people sleeping rough in freezing temperatures, things look and feel very different. Thank you for continuing to support them and St Mungo's.

People experiencing homelessness can often think there is no way out – especially when they face another night sleeping on the cold, dark streets.

Our Christmas advert (opposite) shares the urgent need to keep St Mungo's on the streets, so we can bring as many people as possible into safety.

On page 4, Eva, a St Mungo's Outreach Coordinator, shares how she is out in Westminster day and night to do just that.

There are Charlotte and Hannah on page 6, who share how during the festive period things can be harder than usual for clients, and the work they're doing to support them.

We meet Ola on page 8, who explains the critical need for us to respond to changes in the criminal justice system.

And on page 10, our client Sinclair shares how support from St Mungo's has been life changing.

Wishing you a very happy festive season and thank you again. Your support allows us to help thousands of people and is truly appreciated – both now and all year round.



Emma Haddad
Chief Executive,
St Mungo's

Contents:

- P2 An advert with an important message
- P4 Eva and Outreach
- P6 Our Complex Needs Team
- P8 Thoughts from a Prison Team Leader
- P10 Sinclair's story
- P12 Get involved!

Now is the time to respond

You may see our advert on your TV this winter. Why? We need more help to keep St Mungo's on the frontline. By doing so, we can provide urgent help to people sleeping rough.

The advert features Sam, a St Mungo's frontline worker. She helps Anna, who is exposed to the brutality of living on the streets for the first time.

Whilst the people in our advert may just be characters, they represent the people we are seeing on a daily basis. The number of people in Anna's position is at an all-time high, and is still increasing, month on month.

27%
more people have been pushed into rough sleeping*, facing freezing temperatures, life-threatening illness and violence.

Sadly, the cost of living crisis, lack of housing and increased strain on public services are leaving more people homeless.

By sharing the harsh reality of homelessness far and wide, we're hoping more people will join you – our supporters, in taking action.

The rapid rise in people sleeping rough is pushing St Mungo's workers to the brink. But with your help, and theirs, we can continue to find people sleeping on the streets before it's too late.

Rough sleeping on the streets means night after night of freezing temperatures, the threat of sickness and violence.

Whether we offer a safe, warm place to sleep or a hot meal, extra support allows us to help people when they need us most.

*Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Rough sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2023

“Nights are getting colder and there is a real risk of death.”



In the cold months, there is something comforting about being in a warm, safe home. For people sleeping on the streets, this can feel out of reach. St Mungo's Outreach Coordinator, Eva Pizzey, shares the urgent need to help the growing number of people sleeping rough.

What does your role at St Mungo's involve?

We have teams in various locations across England, but I work in Westminster, London.

Day to day, I'm out on the streets, looking for and offering help to people sleeping rough and lots of them have complex needs.

We're responsible for making sure there's a plan to get them off the streets. We assess their support needs and identify which people are most at risk – this can mean reporting concerns to mental health teams, GP's, hospitals and other services.

How urgent is the situation?

Rough sleeping is at an all-time high. Last month we saw 500 people on the streets – and that was just in Westminster.

St Mungo's needs to be there to provide immediate support. If we aren't, it can be too late to help.

What is it like for someone rough sleeping in winter?

Last year we had several people dying on the streets during winter, including at least one from hypothermia.

It's getting colder out and darker earlier, and when there are vulnerable people on the streets there's a real risk of death.

More people sleeping rough are going into areas which are enclosed and warmer – but not safer. I had one client I was working with who had been sleeping in an electricity cupboard for eight months. He didn't know where else to go.

How does St Mungo's tackle this?

It's so important we're visible, to bring people into safety and change the situation they are in.

Every day of the year, we're making referrals and signposting people on the streets to other services. We're also making sure they have food and bedding.

It's our supporters who help make this happen.

Public services are being stripped back, but the number of people sleeping rough is growing. St Mungo's is an important bridge that connects people to the help they need – this is more vital than ever.

With thanks to you, our supporters...

Last year we supported

23,827

people who were homeless, or at risk of it.



Of these,

9,040

people were supported by one of our

13 outreach services.



We supported

439

people into our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) accommodation.



Of our clients that moved on from St Mungo's services, nearly

70%

did so in a planned way, reflecting their recovery and needs.



“People experiencing homelessness can fall through the cracks. But we advocate for them and get them the right support.”

Complex Needs Workers, Charlotte and Hannah, talk about the work they do to support clients' mental and physical wellbeing – including the benefits of providing holistic treatments.



Charlotte

I like to think of the team as problem solvers, working directly with clients and building relationships with them.

The people we work with have been through so much and many have had traumatic experiences from a young age.

As a result, we often see people self-medicating with substances to help them cope with their trauma. People who use substances are often denied access to mental health services despite their trauma, so our team step in and advocate for people to make sure they get the right support.

One thing we do around substance use is provide ear acupuncture to clients which can help ease cravings and withdrawals.

Based on traditional Chinese medicine, we put five needles into each ear, which stimulates acupressure points that ease muscles and increase blood flow.

The people we work with have so much trauma saved up in their body and are often in survival mode to just get through the day.

We offer a safe environment for someone to put their body in a calm state, even if it's for just 15 minutes.

The first three times I ran clinics I had someone break down in tears – they took the opportunity to spend time in silence, using a non-verbal way to focus on their wellbeing. The treatment is a powerful way to remind clients that they are physically present.

“With Christmas approaching, this is a really hard time for many of our clients. We see adverts which focus on being in a warm home, with loved ones and eating big meals. This is just not the reality for so many people we meet.”

They have often experienced bereavement or a breakdown in relationships, so it can be a time where people feel extremely isolated. Our team see a spike in overdoses around December, which is why last year we organised community drop-ins.

These are a safe space for people to tell us how they would like to be supported over Christmas.

We discuss substance use harm reduction techniques and recent drug supply changes. They practice how to use Naloxone, a medicine that can save lives by rapidly reversing opioid overdoses.

“The need for this service and the rest of our work is vital. Your continued support can help us to change the lives of many more people.”



Hannah

We tailor our support to meet the needs of the hundreds of clients we work with each year.

This includes support work around substance abuse and mental health, but also carrying out research and training on complex issues and how they present in the homelessness community.

“We’ve had a lot of wins to celebrate, all made possible by the people who support us.”

One of our clients, Carlos* was obviously unwell, but there was nothing concrete to say what was wrong. He was always confused – self-neglecting, not eating, his flat was unkempt and his rent arrears rising where he hadn't updated his housing benefit.

Getting Carlos the correct medical attention was something we pushed for.

The GP couldn't do a home visit because he wasn't bed bound and the ambulance service wouldn't come out as they said he had capacity – he used to say “yes” to questions without really knowing what was going on.

As well as this, a psychiatrist didn't want to see Carlos until he'd had a brain scan, and a community mental health team tried to visit but he wasn't in at the time.

After much advocating for Carlos to make sure his needs were recognised and met, we managed to get a referral for a brain scan. His behaviour made sense once the scan

showed a lot of damage and that he needed extra support.

Fast forward to today, Carlos is getting help and hopefully going to a care home soon.

But there's still so much to do.

We visit St Mungo's accommodation services to help minimise the risks arising from hoarding, offending behaviours, learning difficulties and sex working to name a few.

Our helpline is available during the week, so anyone in St Mungo's can contact us about complex issues and we provide help the same day.

“As we're in the middle of winter, we're reminded how cold and wet it is.”

Christmas comes along and so many of our client group feel 'left behind' that there is no end in sight for their homelessness. This makes staying sober very difficult when people are in recovery.

Lots of services are closed for an extended period of time at Christmas. But thanks to your continued support, at St Mungo's we provide support all year round.

With your help, together we can rebuild lives and make the end of our client's homelessness a reality.

**To protect the identity of our client, their name has been changed.*

“Reducing homelessness goes hand in hand with preventing reoffending.”

Ola is a Team Leader at St Mungo’s, delivering housing and intervention services to people leaving prison, to help reduce the chance of them becoming homeless. Following government plans for early releases, he shares why our resources are both vital and stretched.

Earlier this year, the government announced plans to stop an “impending collapse” of the criminal justice system.*

The Lord Chancellor explained that some prisoners will be released after they have served 40% of their sentence in England and Wales, rather than the current 50%.

This decision was made to prevent our prisons from overflowing.

In July male prisons had been running at over 99% capacity for the past 18 months.

The Lord Chancellor explained the consequences of not carrying out this emergency measure: “If the criminal justice system collapses, there will be a total breakdown of law and order. Prison officers are at risk, no cells are available, and suspects cannot be held in custody.”**

Ola speaking to team members Anya and Wonde



Responding to change

Myself, Anya and Wonde (pictured) are part of the team who provide housing advice and intervention services to all male prison leavers in London.

We also help prison leavers who are returning to a London borough.

Our team provides support with housing issues to over 6,000 clients every year.

45% of all St Mungo’s clients have been through the criminal justice system – this includes women, who we support through other St Mungo’s services.

When the announcement on early releases was made, it was clear we needed to be responsive and adapt how we work. In London alone, we could be supporting an extra 600 people leaving prison each month.

“If we want to reduce the risk of reoffending and homelessness rates, we must secure suitable housing for prison leavers.”

Time sensitive support

The scheme started in September, and we’re seeing some people released up to three months early.

We may have less time to help, but we still need to work with people leaving prison to make sure they have a secure home to go to.



“We’ll see a steep increase in the amount of people sleeping on the streets and the chances of them reoffending is higher.”

Our team need to act as role models to our clients, and be there to support them every step of the way. Without this, much of the time they have no one helping them move forward in the right direction.

Peace of mind and fresh starts

Not long ago I worked with a client who had a tenancy agreement before entering prison.

He would not be able to pay rent while in prison. Due to the length of his sentence, a large amount of debt would mount up which would be very difficult to pay back.

During his time in prison, we were able to support the client by speaking with his next of kin and landlord. Together, we agreed a repayment plan, so he had somewhere to live when he left prison.

For the people we are supporting in prison, knowing they won’t be homeless at the end of their sentence can result in changing other aspects of their lives.

Knowing his housing situation was in hand, he was able to focus on getting the skills to gain employment.

We linked him to the training and employment team in the prison – he left with a job at a local supermarket and a home.

By helping St Mungo’s, you’re supporting us to rebuild lives and plan for a better, safer future.

*[gov.uk/government/news/lord-chancellor-sets-out-immediate-action-to-defuse-ticking-prison-time-bomb](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-chancellor-sets-out-immediate-action-to-defuse-ticking-prison-time-bomb)

**[gov.uk/government/speeches/new-lord-chancellor-sets-out-measures-to-avert-prison-capacity-crisis](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/new-lord-chancellor-sets-out-measures-to-avert-prison-capacity-crisis)



“My life has changed. I feel like I’m a millionaire when I’m here.”



Sinclair used to be homeless and had a life of selling and taking drugs. With support from St Mungo’s – including help to secure a work placement, things look very different for him now.



I remember my dad coming to find me when I was taking drugs on the street. He said “get in the car, you’re coming home.” I went with him, and he told me that if this was my life, I wouldn’t get anywhere.

My mum had passed away by this point, so I only had my dad left. By looking in his eyes, it was clear that seeing me like that was ripping him to pieces.

Where it began

I was using drugs and started selling them when I was 22. Taking crack and heroin was the first thing I thought of when I woke up.

It all started to go wrong, and I was stealing money from my mum. She didn’t want me to

live in the house and I became homeless.

There were ways to survive – people were willing to let me sleep on their sofas, but I had nowhere else to go. I would regularly get high and pass out on the streets and be in and out of trouble with the police.

Help from St Mungo’s

I eventually went to rehab and when I left, I was referred to a St Mungo’s hostel and psychiatrist.

With my counsellor’s support, I started dealing with my feelings and emotions.

One day she said to me “you’re doing good, shall we look at getting you into some voluntary work?”

“I said yes, and that’s when St Mungo’s employment team introduced me to Jodie at Paws & Pause dog daycare.”



I secured a voluntary position and was nervous to join at first, but I didn’t have to worry.

Some business owners would say “no, I don’t trust you”. But Jodie and the team made it clear that as long as I’m getting help and changing, their door is always open.

At Paws & Pause I get to play and show love – and the dogs love me too! We feed, wash and play with them, as if they were our own.

Working here makes me feel like I’m part of something – a mature man and member of the public.

I was a drug addict for 12 years and in this time, you don’t really have responsibilities. So it’s exciting to learn things as I go along – listening to feedback, becoming independent and respecting boundaries.

My mental health has improved through pet therapy. When I used to do drugs it gave me endorphins – interacting with the dogs does the same and it’s not dangerous.

Looking to the future

I’m halfway through my work placement, and if I play my cards right, I might get to be a permanent employee.

And after being in St Mungo’s accommodation for two years, I’m leaving soon and moving into my own council flat.

Life changing support

I’ve learnt that St Mungo’s is always there to support you emotionally, physically and mentally.

“I want more people to experience when St Mungo’s offer a hand and say they can help, they really mean it.”

“But there’s a lot more people out there who need St Mungo’s – who like me, thought there was no support and felt scared to tell someone they need help.”



Give the gift of time this winter

Can you spare a couple of hours to support our Christmas collections?

This December we're back out in Bath, Bristol and London with our bucket collections!

We're looking for volunteers to join us. Your support would help us raise money and work towards our goal of ending homelessness and rebuilding lives.

If you are an enthusiastic person who wants to get involved, we'd be so grateful for your help.

All volunteers are given a full briefing on the day about the role. We'll also give you a St Mungo's t-shirt and collection bucket to help you to raise as much as possible!



View all volunteering dates and sign up at **mungos.org/christmas-collections** or scan the QR code.



StreetLink is a service that connects people rough sleeping to support provided by local authorities and charities.

St Mungo's helps to run the service in London, but

StreetLink can be used throughout England and Wales.

Become a volunteer

StreetLink is a volunteer service and always looking for more people to help. You can support in managing alerts and phone calls about people sleeping rough.

If you see someone sleeping rough in your area this winter, visit **TheStreetLink.org.uk** to create an alert.

When you submit an alert, you help outreach teams to locate rough sleepers and connect them with local services dedicated to helping people off the streets.

To find out more about making a difference, visit the [StreetLink website](https://TheStreetLink.org.uk) or email volunteer@streetlink.org.uk

Thank you for reading this edition of *Frontline*. We hope you enjoyed it. If you have any questions or feedback, feel free to contact us using the details provided.



Supporter Care team

Email: supportercare@mungos.org

St Mungo's, 3 Thomas More Square,
London, E1W 1YW

Registered Charity No. 1149085. Company No. 8225808
(England and Wales) Housing Association No. LH0279

Follow us on social media:

  @StMungos  @StMungosUK

StMungo's

If you would like to change your contact preferences or sign up to receive Frontline, please contact our Supporter Care team. Our privacy policy explains how we use personal information, for more details please visit: mungos.org/privacy-policy